

Fatal Strategies

Ecstasy and inertia

Things have found a way to elude the dialectic of meaning, a dialectic which bored them: they did this by infinite proliferation, by potentializing themselves, by outmatching their essence, by going to extremes, and by obscenity which henceforth has become their immanent purpose and insane justification.

We can imagine obtaining the same effects by going in the inverse order, attaining another insanity, one that also is victorious. And when insanity is victorious in every way, we have the principle of Evil.

The universe is not dialectical: it moves toward the extremes, and not toward equilibrium; it is devoted to a radical antagonism, and not to reconciliation or to synthesis. And it is the same with the principle of Evil. It is expressed in the cunning genius of the object, in the ecstatic form of the pure object, and in its victorious strategy over the subject.

This victory operates by subtle forms of radicalizing hidden qualities, and by combating obscenity with its own weapons. To the more true than true we will oppose the more false than false. We will not oppose the beautiful and the ugly; we will seek what is more ugly than the ugly: the monstrous. We will not oppose the visible to the hidden; we will seek what is more hidden than the hidden: the secret.

We will not seek change, nor oppose the fixed and the mobile; we will seek what is more mobile than the mobile: metamorphosis ... We will not distinguish the true from the false; we will seek what is more false than the false: illusion and appearance ...

In this ascent to extremes, while we may need to oppose it in a radical way, we may perhaps need to accumulate the effects of obscenity and seduction.

We will seek something faster than communication: the challenge, the duel. Communication is too slow; it is an effect of slowness; it proceeds through contact and speech. The look is much faster; it is the medium of the media, the quickest. Everything must occur instantaneously. We never communicate. In the to and fro of communication the speed of the look, of light, and of seduction is already lost.

But also, against the acceleration of networks and circuits, we will seek slowness; not the nostalgic slowness of the mind, but an insurmountable immobility, what is slower than the slow: inertia and silence. Inertia is insurmountable even with effort, as is silence even in a dialogue. There is a secret here as well.

Just as the model is more real than the real (being the quintessence of the significant aspects of a situation), acquiring thus a vertiginous impression of truth, the amazing aspect of fashion is that it is more beautiful than the beautiful: it is fascinating. Its seductive capacity is independent of all judgements. It exceeds the aesthetic form in the ecstatic form of unconditional metamorphosis.

Whereas the aesthetic form always implies a moral distinction between the beautiful and the ugly, the ecstatic form is immoral. If there is a secret to fashion, beyond the sheer pleasures of art and taste, it is this immorality, the sovereignty of ephemeral models, the fragile and total passion which excludes all feelings, and the arbitrary, superficial and regulated metamorphosis, which excludes all desire (unless in fact this is desire).

If in fact this is desire, we can imagine that in the social, in the political, and in every domain other than the ornamental, desire would also show a preference for immoral forms, which are equally affected by the potential denial of all value judgements and more dedicated to the ecstatic destiny that wrenches things from their "subjective" quality, leaving them solely to the attraction of the redoubled trait, of the reduplicated definition, and that wrenches them from their "objective" causes, leaving them solely to the power of their unbridled effects.

Every characteristic thus elevated to the superlative power, caught in an intensifying spiral – more true than the true, more beautiful than the beautiful, more real than the real – is assured a vertiginous effect that is independent of all content or specific quality, and which presently has the tendency of being our only passion. The passion of intensification, of escalation, of mounting power, of ecstasy, of whatever quality so long as, having ceased to be relative to its opposite (the true to the false, the beautiful to the ugly, the real to the imaginary), it becomes superlative, positively sublime as if it had

absorbed the energy of its opposite. Imagine something beautiful that has absorbed all the energy of the ugly: you have fashion ... Imagine truth having absorbed all the energy of the false: you have simulation ...

Seduction is itself vertiginous, being the effect not of some simple attraction, but of an attraction that is redoubled in a sort of challenge to or fatality of its essence: "I am not beautiful, I am worse," proclaimed Marie Duval.

We have become completely absorbed by models, completely absorbed by fashion, completely absorbed by simulation: Roger Caillois was perhaps correct in his terminology, and our whole culture is in the process of shifting from games of competition and expression to games of risk and vertigo. Uncertainty, even about fundamentals, drives us to a vertiginous overmultiplication of formal qualities. Hence we move to the form of ecstasy. Ecstasy is that quality specific to each body that spirals in on itself until it has lost all meaning, and thus radiates as pure and empty form. Fashion is the ecstasy of the beautiful: the pure and empty form of a spiraling aesthetics. Simulation is the ecstasy of the real. To prove this, all you need do is watch television, where real events follow one another in a perfectly ecstatic relation, that is to say through vertiginous and stereotyped traits, unreal and recurrent, which allow for continuous and uninterrupted juxtapositions. Ecstatic: such is the object of advertising, and such is the consumer in the eyes of advertising. Advertising is the spiraling of use value and exchange value to the point of annulment, into the pure and empty form of a lack ...

But we need to go further: anti-pedagogy is the ecstatic form, that is to say, the pure and empty form of pedagogy. The anti-theater is the ecstatic form of theater: no more stage, no more content; theater in the streets, without actors, theater for everyone by everyone, which, to a certain extent, would merge with the exact unfolding of our lives, lives without illusion. Where is the power of illusion if theater delights merely in mimicking our daily life and in transfiguring our work place? Yet it is in this manner that art looks to escape itself, to deny itself. The more art tries to realize itself, the more it hyperrealizes itself, the more it transcends itself to find its own empty essence. There is vertigo here as well, a vertigo *mise-en-abyme* and stupefied. Nothing has been more effective in stupefying the "creative" act, in making it shine in its pure and inane form, than Duchamp's unexpected exhibition of a wine rack in an art gallery. The ecstasy of a prosaic object transfers the pictorial act into its ecstatic form — which henceforth without an object will spiral in on itself and in a sense disappear, but not without exercising over us a

definite fascination. Art, today, merely practises the magic of disappearance.

Imagine something good that would shine forth from all the power of Evil: that's God, a perverse god who in defiance created the world, enjoining it to destroy itself ...

What is also fascinating is the surpassing of the social, the irruption of the more social than the social: the masses. Here as well we have a social that has absorbed all the inverse energies of the antisocial, or inertia, of resistance, and of silence. With the masses, the logic of the social is at its extreme: the point where its finalities are inverted and where it reaches its point of inertia and extermination, but where at the same time it verges on ecstasy. The masses are the ecstasy of the social, the ecstatic form of the social, the mirror where the social is reflected in its total immanence.

The real does not concede anything to the benefit of the imaginary: it concedes only to the benefit of the more real than real (the hyperreal) and to the more true than true. This is simulation.

Presence is not effaced by a void, but by a redoubling of presence that effaces the opposition between presence and absence. Nor is a void effaced by fullness, but rather by repletion and saturation, by a plenitude greater than fullness. This is the reaction of the body by obesity, of sex by obscenity, an abreaction to a void.

Motion does not disappear so much in immobility as it does in speed and acceleration, in what is more mobile than movement, so to speak, and which transports it to extremes while depriving it of meaning.

Sexuality does not vanish in sublimation, repression and morality. It vanishes more effectively in what is more sexual than sex: pornography. The hypersexual is the contemporary of the hyperreal.

More generally, visible things do not terminate in obscurity and in silence; they vanish into what is more visible than the visible: obscenity.

An example of this ex-centricity of things, of this drift into excrescence, is the irruption of randomness, indeterminacy, and relativity within our system. The reaction to this new state of things has not been a resigned abandonment of traditional values, but rather a crazy overdetermination, an exacerbation, of these values of reference; function, finality, and causality. Perhaps nature is, in fact, horrified by the void, for it is in the void, and in order to avoid it, that plethoric, hypertrophic, and saturated systems emerge. Some-thing redundant always settles in the place where there is no longer any-thing.

Determinacy does not withdraw to the benefit of indeterminacy,

but to the benefit of a hyperdeterminacy: the redundancy of determinacy in a void.

Finality does not disappear in favor of the aleatory, but rather in favor of hyperfinality, of a hyperfunctionality: more functional than the functional, more final than the final – the hypertelic (*hypertélie*).

Having been plunged into an in-ordinate uncertainty by randomness, we have responded by an excess of causality and teleology. Hypertelic growth is not an accident in the evolution of certain species, it is the challenge of telos as a response to increasing indeterminacy. In a system where things are increasingly left to chance, telos turns into delirium, and develops entities that know all too well how to exceed their own ends, to the point of invading the entire system.

This is true of the behavior of the cancerous cell (hypervitality in a single direction), of the hyperspecialization of objects and people, of the operationalism of the smallest detail, and of the hypersignification of the slightest sign: the leitmotiv of our daily lives. But this is also the chancroid secret of every obese and cancerous system: those of communication, of information, of production, of destruction – each having long since exceeded the limits of functionality, and use value, in order to enter the phantasmic escalation of finalities.

The hysteria of causality, the inverse of the hysteria of finalities, which corresponds to the simultaneous effacement of origins and causes, is the obsessive search for origins, for responsibility, for reference; an attempt to extinguish phenomena in infinitesimal causes. But it is also the genesis and genetics complex, which on various accounts are represented by psychoanalytic palingenesis (the whole psyche hypostatized in prime infancy, every sign a symptom); and biogenetics (all probabilities saturated by the fatal ordering of molecules); and the hypertrophying of historical research, the delirium of explaining everything, of ascribing everything, of referencing everything ... All this becomes a fantastic burden – references living one off the other and at the other's expense. Here again we have an excrescent interpretive system developing without any relation to its objective. All of this is a consequence of a forward flight in the face of the haemorrhaging of objective causes.

Inertial phenomena are accelerating. Arrested forms proliferate, and growth is immobilized in excrescence. This is the form of the hypertelic, that which goes beyond its own ends: the crustacean that strays far from the ocean unable to return (to what secret end?); or the increasing gigantism of Easter Island statues.

Tentacular, protuberant, excrescent, hypertelic: this is the inertial destiny of a saturated world. The denial of its own end in

hyperfinality; is this not also the mechanism of cancer? The revenge of growth in excrescence. The revenge and summons of speed in inertia. The masses are also caught in this gigantic process of inertia by acceleration. The masses are this excrescent process, which precipitates all growth towards ruin. It is the circuit that is short-circuited by a monstrous finality.

Exxon: the American government requests a complete report on the multinational's activities throughout the world. The result is twelve 1,000 page volumes, whose reading alone, not to mention the analysis, would exceed a few years work. Where is the information?

Should we initiate an information dietetics? Should we thin out the obese, the obese systems, and create institutions to uninform?

The incredible destructive stockpiling of strategic weapons is only equaled by the worldwide demographic overgrowth. As paradoxical as it may seem, both are of the same nature and correspond to the same logic of excrescence and inertia. A triumphant anomaly: no principle of justice or of proportion can temper either one; they incite one another. And worse, there isn't even so much as Promethean defiance here, no excessive passion or pride. It appears simply that the species has crossed a particular mysterious point, where it has become impossible to turn back, to decelerate, or to slow down.

A tormenting thought: as of a certain point, history was no longer *real*. Without noticing it, all mankind suddenly left reality: everything happening since then was supposedly not true; but we supposedly didn't notice. Our task would now be to find that point, and as long as we didn't have it, we would be forced to abide in our present destruction. (Elias Canetti)¹

Dead point:² the neutral point where every system crosses the subtle limit of reversibility, contradiction, and reevaluation, in order to be completely absorbed in noncontradiction, in desperate self-contemplation, and in ecstasy ...

Here begins the pataphysics of systems. Even though logical overcoming, or escalation, always takes the form of a catastrophe in slow motion, it does not only present inconveniences. This is also the case for systems of destruction and for strategic arms. Beyond the limit of the forces of destruction, the stage for war is abolished. There is no longer any practical correlation between the potential for destruction and its purpose, and referring to it becomes ridiculous. The warfare system dissuades itself, and this is the paradoxically beneficial aspect of deterrence (*dissuasion*): there is no longer any space for warfare. Hence we must hope that nuclear escalation and

the arms race will persist. This is the cost of pure warfare;³ that is, of the pure and empty form, of the hyperreal and eternally dissuasive form of warfare, where for the first time we can congratulate ourselves on the absence of events. Like the real, warfare will no longer have any place – except precisely if the nuclear powers are successful in de-escalation and manage to define new spaces for warfare. If military power, at the cost of de-escalating this marvelously practical madness to the second power, reestablishes a setting for warfare, a confined space that is in fact human, then weapons will regain their use value and their exchange value: it will again be possible *to exchange warfare*. In its orbital and ecstatic form warfare has become an impossible exchange, and this orbitalness protects us.

What can we say about Canetti's desire to locate this blind spot beyond which "things have ceased to be real," where history has ceased to exist, without us realizing it, and where, lacking such insight, we can only persevere in our current destruction?

Supposing we could locate such a point, what would we do? What miracle would make history true again? What miracle would allow us to go back in time so that we may prepare ourselves for its disappearance? For this point is also the end of linear time, and all the marvelous inventions of science fiction for "going back in time" are useless if time already no longer exists.

What precautions should we have taken to avoid this historical collapse, this coma, this volatilization of the real? Have we made an error? Has the human race made some error, violated some secret, committed some fatal imprudence? It is as vain to ask such questions as it is to ponder on the mysterious reasons why a woman has left you: nothing could have changed in any case. The terrifying aspect of such an event is that, beyond a certain point, every effort to exorcise it only serves to precipitate it: no premonition has ever been of any use; each event confirms and legitimates the one that preceded it. It is the naivety of attributing a cause to each event which allows us to think that the event need not have occurred: the pure, noncausal event unfolds inescapably; however, this event can never be duplicated, whereas a causal process can always be repeated. Which is precisely why it is no longer an event.

Canetti's wish is therefore pious, if his hypothesis is truly radical. The point to which he refers is, by definition, impossible to recover, because if we could do so it would mean the return of time. The point at which we could reverse the process of dispersion of time and history escapes us – which is why in the first place we crossed it without realizing it, and doing so of course without wishing to.

Besides, the point Canetti seeks may not even exist. It only exists if we can prove that previously there has actually been history – which becomes impossible once this point has been traversed. Outside the realm of history, history itself can no longer reflect, nor even prove its own coherence. This is why we call upon every previous epoch, every way of life, all modes of self-historicizing and of narrating oneself with the support of proof and documentation (everything becomes documentary): we sense that in our era which is that of the end of history all of this is invalidated.

We can neither go back in time, nor accept this situation. Some have cheerfully resolved this dilemma: they have discovered the anti-Canetti point, a deceleration that would allow us to reenter history, the real, and the social, like a stray satellite in hyperspace reentering the Earth's atmosphere. A false sense of the radical misled us into centrifugal spaces; a vital jolt returns us to reality. Once this obsessive fear of the unreality of history, in the sudden collapse of time and the real, has been warded off, everything again becomes real and meaningful.

Maybe they're right. Perhaps it was necessary to stop this haemorrhaging of value. Enough terrorist radicalism, enough simulacra; we need the resurgence of morality, of faith, and of meaning. Down with fatalistic (*crépusculaires*) analyses!

Beyond this point there are only events (and theories) without consequences. Precisely because events absorb their own meaning, nothing is refracted, nothing is presaged.

Beyond this point there are only catastrophes.

Perfect is the event or the language that assumes, and is able to stage, its own mode of disappearance, thus acquiring the maximal energy of appearances. The catastrophe is the maximal raw event, here again more event-like than the event – but an event without consequences and which leaves the world hanging.

When history is no longer meaningful, once the point of inertia is crossed, every event becomes a catastrophe, becomes a pure event, without consequences (but therein lies its power).

The event without consequences is like Musil's man without qualities, like [Deleuze and Guattari's] body without organs, like [Bergson's] time without memory.

When light is harnessed and engulfed by its own source, there occurs a brutal involution of time into the event itself. This is a catastrophe in the literal sense: an inflection or curvature that makes the origin of a thing coincide with its end, and re-turns the end onto the origin in order to annul it, leaving behind an event without precedent and without consequences – the pure event.

This is also the catastrophe of meaning: the event without consequences is identified by the fact that every cause can be indifferently assigned to it, without being able to choose among them ... Its origin is unintelligible, and so is its destination. We can neither reverse the course of time, nor the course of meaning.

Today every event is virtually without consequences, it is open to all possible interpretations, none of which can fix meaning: the equiprobability of every cause and of every consequence – a multiple and aleatory ascription.

If the wavelengths of meaning, and of historical memory and time around the event are shrinking, if the wavelengths of causality around the effect are fading, it is because light is slowing down (and, today, the event has truly become a wave: it does not simply travel "on a wavelength," it is a wave which is undecipherable in terms of language or meaning; it is only, and instantaneously, decipherable in terms of color, tactility, ambience, in terms of sensory effects). Somewhere a gravitational effect causes the light of event(s), the light that transports meaning beyond the event itself, the carrier of messages, to slow down to a halt; like the light of politics and history that we now so weakly perceive, or the light of celestial bodies we now only receive as faint simulacra.

We must be able to grasp the catastrophe that awaits us in the slowing of light: the slower light becomes, the less it escapes its source; thus things and events tend not to release their meaning, tend to slow down their emanation, to harness that which was previously refracted in order to absorb it in a black hole.

Science fiction has always been attracted by speeds exceeding the speed of light. Light traveling below such a speed, however, would be much more bizarre.

The speed of light protects the reality of things by guaranteeing that the images we have of them are contemporaneous. The plausibility of a causal universe would disappear with some appreciable change in this speed. All things would interfere in total disaster. This is the extent to which this speed is our referent, our God, and for us represents the absolute. If the speed of light becomes relative, then no more transcendence, no more God to recognize his own, and the universe lapses into indeterminacy.

This is happening today with electronic media, where information is beginning to circulate everywhere at the speed of light. There is no longer any absolute with which to measure the rest. But beneath this acceleration something is beginning to slow down absolutely. Perhaps it is we who are beginning to slow down absolutely.

What if light slowed to "human" speeds? If it bathed us in a flux

of slow motion images, to the point of being slower than our own movements?

We would thus need to generalize the example of the light that reaches us from stars long since extinct – their images taking light-years to reach us. If light was infinitely slower, a host of things, closer to home, would already have been subject to the fate of these stars: we would see them, they would be there, yet already no longer there. Would this not also be the case for a reality in which the image of a thing still appears, but is no longer there? An analogy with mental objects, and the ether of the mind.

Or, assuming that light travels very slowly, bodies could approach us faster than their image, and what would happen then? We would be struck without ever seeing the obstacles approaching. In fact we can imagine a universe, the opposite of our own, where all bodies move much slower than the speed of light, a universe where bodies would travel at phenomenal speeds, but light would travel very slowly. It would be total chaos, no longer regulated by the simultaneity of optical messages.

The speed of light, like the wind, would be variable, there would be moments of stillness when no image would reach us from the effected zones.

Like perfume, light would vary according to different bodies, scarcely diffusing beyond the immediate environment, a field of optical messages fading at a distance. The images of bodies would scarcely propagate beyond a luminous territory, outside of which they would no longer exist.

Or again, light traveling at the speed of continental drifts, like continental plates sliding on one another creating seismic movements that would distort every image and our perception of space.

Can we imagine the slow refraction of faces and gestures, like the strokes of a swimmer in heavy water? How could we look someone in the eye, how would we seduce them if we are not sure that they are still there? What if cinematographic slow motion seized the whole universe? There is comical excitement in the accelerated, as it transcends meaning by explosion; but there is poetic enchantment in the decelerated, as it destroys meaning by implosion.

Ever since acceleration has become our common condition, suspense and slow motion are the current forms of the tragic. Time is no longer present in its normal unfolding, ever since it has become distended and enlarged to the floating dimension of reality. It is no longer illuminated by a will; nor is space any longer defined by movement. Since we have lost a historical destiny, it is necessary that a kind of predestination reinterfere to provide some sense of

the tragic. This predestination can be seen in suspense and in slow motion. It is these which suspend the unfolding of form to such an extent that meaning no longer crystallizes. Or, in the dis-course of meaning, it is the slow emergence of another meaning that comes to implode into the first one. So slow that light would curl up on itself and even come to a halt; it would initiate a total suspension of the universe.

This play of systems around the point of inertia is modeled on the form of catastrophe inherent to the era of simulation; the seismic form. The form that lacks a ground, in the form of a fault and of failure, of dehiscence and of fractal objects, where immense plates, entire sections, slide under one another and produce intense surface tremors. No longer in the form of a devouring fire in the sky that strikes us down, a generative lightning that was (at) once punishment and purification, and which regenerated the earth. Nor is it in the form of a deluge, which is more of a maternal catastrophe at the point of the origin of the world. These are the great legendary and mythical forms that haunt us. The most recent one is in the form of an explosion, culminating in the obsession over nuclear catastrophe (but conversely, it has fueled the myth of the Big Bang, of the explosion as the origin of the universe). The seismic form is even more recent: it demonstrates the extent to which the forms of catastrophe take the shape of their culture. Cities are distinguished by the forms of catastrophe they have assumed, which is the animating aspect of their charm. New York is King Kong, or the blackout, or the vertical bombardment, the Towering Inferno. Los Angeles is the horizontal fault line, with California breaking off and sliding into the Pacific: the earthquake. This form is today much more immediate and evocative: of the same nature as fission and instantaneous propagation; of the same nature as the undulatory, the spasmodic and radical mutations. The sky is no longer falling on your head; it is the terrain that is sliding. We are in a fissile universe; a universe of erratic icebergs and horizontal drifts. Interstitial collapse: this is the effect of the seismic rupture that awaits us, and of mental seismic ruptures as well. The dehiscence of the most tightly closed things; the shaking of things that tighten up, and that contract on their emptiness. For at bottom the ground never existed, only a cracked epidermis. Nor was there ever depth, which we know undergoes fusion. Seismic movements tell us this; they are the requiem of the infrastructure. We can no longer observe the stars or the sky; we must now observe the subterranean deities that threaten a collapse into the void.

We also dream of harnessing this energy, but this is sheer madness.

We might as well harness the energy of automobile accidents, or of dogs that have been run over, or of all things that collapse. (A new hypothesis: if things have a greater tendency to disappear and to collapse, perhaps the principal source of future energy will be accidents and catastrophes). One thing is certain, even if we are never able to harness seismic energy, the symbolic wave of an earthquake will most likely never subside: symbolic energy, so to speak, which is to say the power of fascination and derision at such an event, is incomparable to any material destruction.

It is this energy, this rupturing symbolic energy, that we in fact strive to harness in such an insane project, or in a more immediate one, in the anticipation of seismic movements by various evacuation scenarios. The scandal is that experts have calculated that a state of emergency declared on the basis of a prediction of seismic activity would trigger off a panic whose consequences would be more disastrous than the catastrophe itself. Here again we are fully in the midst of derision: in the absence of a real catastrophe it is quite possible to trigger one off by simulation, equivalent to the former, and which can be substituted for it. One wonders if this is not what fuels the fantasies of the "experts" – which is exactly the case within the nuclear domain: isn't every system of prevention and deterrence a virtual locus of catastrophe? Designed to thwart catastrophe, it materializes all of its consequences in the immediate present. Since we cannot count on chance to bring about a catastrophe, we must find an equivalent programmed into the defense system.

It is thus evident that a country or government sophisticated enough to predict earthquakes and prevent their consequences would constitute a much greater danger to the community and the species than the seismic activity itself. The *Terremotati* of southern Italy have violently attacked the Italian government for its negligence (the media arrived before the emergency assistance, an obvious sign of our current hierarchy of priorities). They quite justifiably blamed the political order for the catastrophe (to the extent that it claims to guard the general welfare of the population). But never could it imagine a system capable of complete prevention of catastrophes: everyone would in fact have to prefer catastrophe, which at least, with its miseries, corresponds to the prophetic oracle of a violent end. At least it satisfies the political order's underlying exigency for derision. The same is true for terrorism: what would become of a country capable of annihilating terrorism at its source (Germany)? It would have to implement the same level of terrorism; it would have to generalize terror at all levels. If this is the cost of security, does the whole world in its heart of hearts dream of it?

Pompeii. Everything in this city is metaphysical, including its dream-like geometry, not a geometry of space, but a mental geometry, one of labyrinths – the freezing of time even more poignant in the midday heat.

The tactile presence of these ruins, their suspense, their revolving shadows, their everydayness, is magnificent for the psyche. It is the conjunction of the banality of a stroll and the immanence of another time, of another instant, unique, a time of catastrophe. The deadly, but extinguished, presence of Vesuvius gives the deserted streets the charm of a hallucination – the illusion of being here and now, on the verge of eruption – and it is resuscitated, by a miracle of nostalgia, two thousand years later in the immanence of a previous life.

Few places leave such an impression of strange disturbance (it is no surprise that Jansen and Freud have located here the psychic function of Gradiva). It is the very warmth of death that we sense here, brought to life in the fossilized and fugitive signs of everyday existence: wheel tracks in the rock; the signs of wear in the curb; the petrified wood of a half opened door; the pleat of a toga on a body buried in ashes. No history, like the one which gives prestige to monuments, can intervene between these things and ourselves. They are materialized here, at once, in the very heat where death seized them.

Neither monumentality nor beauty are essential to Pompeii – as are the fatal intimacy of things and the fascination in their simultaneity, like the perfect simulacrum of our own death.

Pompeii is a sort of trompe-l'oeil, a sort of primitive scene: the same vertigo with one dimension missing: time; the same hallucination with an added dimension: the transparency of the smallest detail, like the clear vision of trees completely submerged at the bottom of an artificial lake, which you glide over in stride. This is the mental effect of catastrophe: stopping things before they come to an end, and holding them suspended in their apparition.

Pompeii again destroyed by an earthquake. What kind of catastrophe so unrelentlessly pursues ruins? What is a ruin that needs to be demolished and buried again? The sadistic irony of catastrophe is that it secretly awaits for things, even ruins, to regain their beauty and meaning only to destroy them once again. It is intent upon destroying the illusion of eternity, but it also plays with that illusion, since it fixates things in an alternate eternity. This fixation-paralysis, the shattering of a presence swarming with life in a catastrophic instant, is what gave Pompeii its charm. The first catastrophe, Vesuvius, was a success. The last seismic movement is much more

problematic. It appears to obey the rule of the doubling of events in an effect of parody: the pathetic repetition of the great original. The accomplishment of a great destiny with a little help from a wretched divinity. But it has perhaps another meaning; it comes as a warning that this is no longer the era of great collapses, of resurrections, or of games of death and eternity, but the era of little fractionized events, of smooth and effective annihilation, by progressive slippage, an era henceforth without a future, since the traces themselves erase this new destiny. This inaugurates the horizontal era of events without consequences; the last act was staged by nature itself in a glimmer of parody.

Toward a principle of evil

Do these fatal strategies exist? It does not appear that I have described them, nor even touched upon them. The power of the real over the imagination is so great that such a hypothesis appears to be no more than a dream. Where do you get the stories you tell about the object? Objectivity is the opposite of fatality. The object is real, and the real is subject to laws, and that is that.

There it is: faced with a delirious world, only the ultimatum of realism will do. Which means that if you wish to escape the world's insanity, you must sacrifice all of its charm as well. By increasing its delirium, the world has raised the stakes of the sacrifice, blackmailed by reality. Today, in order to survive, illusion no longer works; one must draw nearer to the nullity of the real.

There is perhaps one, and only one, fatal strategy: theory. And undoubtedly the only difference between a banal theory and a fatal theory is that in the former the subject always believes itself to be more clever than the object, while in the latter the object is always taken to be more clever, more cynical, more ingenious than the subject, which it awaits at every turn. The metamorphoses, tactics, and strategies of the object exceed the subject's understanding. The object is neither the subject's double nor his or her repression; neither the subject's fantasy nor hallucination; neither the subject's mirror nor reflection: but it has its own strategy. It withholds one of the rules of the game which is inaccessible to the subject, not because it is deeply mysterious, but because it is endlessly ironic.

An objective irony watches over us, it is the object's fulfillment without regard for the subject, nor for its alienation. In the alienation phase, subjective irony is triumphant. Here the subject constitutes an unsolvable challenge to the blind world that surrounds him.